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Vol. 8 No. 4
June / July 1991

JAZZIZ Magazine (USPS 002-223) (ISSN 0741-5885). JUNE / JULY 1991, Vol. 8 No. 4. Published bimonthly by The JAZZIZ Magazine, Inc., 3620 N.W. 43rd Street, Suite D, Gainesville, FL 32606. Second-class postage paid at Gainesville, FL and at additional mailing offices. All contents copyright © 1991 by The JAZZIZ Magazine, Inc. All rights reserved. JAZZIZ is a trademark of The JAZZIZ Magazine, Inc. Editorial and Executive Offices: JAZZIZ Magazine, 3620 N.W. 43rd Street, Suite D, Gainesville, FL 32606. Telephone (904) 375-3705. Michael Fagien, President; Lori B. Fagien, Vice President. ADVERTISING SALES OFFICE: Main, Lori B. Fagien, JAZZIZ Advertising, 3620 N.W. 43rd Street, Suite D, Gainesville, FL 32606, 1-904-375-3705. *Subscription Service:* One-year subscription rate for the United States and its possessions \$12.95, two years \$25.00; Canada one-year \$18.00. All others one-year \$30.00. Single issue \$2.95 United States, all others \$3.95. Back issues \$4.00 each in United States, all others \$6.00 each (includes postage and handling). POSTMASTER: Send address changes to: JAZZIZ, Circulation Department, 3620 N.W. 43rd St., Suite D, Gainesville, FL 32605, or call 1-904-375-3705. For change of address, please enclose both old and new address and most recent mailing label. Allow 8 weeks for change to become effective. Direct non-subscription correspondence to Editorial Department. Permissions: Nothing can be reproduced in any manner without prior written permission of JAZZIZ. Printed in U.S.A. *Editorial and Photographic Contributions:* Must be accompanied by return postage and will be handled with care; however, publisher assumes no responsibility for the return or safety of artwork, photography or manuscripts. All rights in letters sent to JAZZIZ will be treated as unconditionally assigned for publication and copyright purposes, subject to unrestricted right to edit and to comment editorially.

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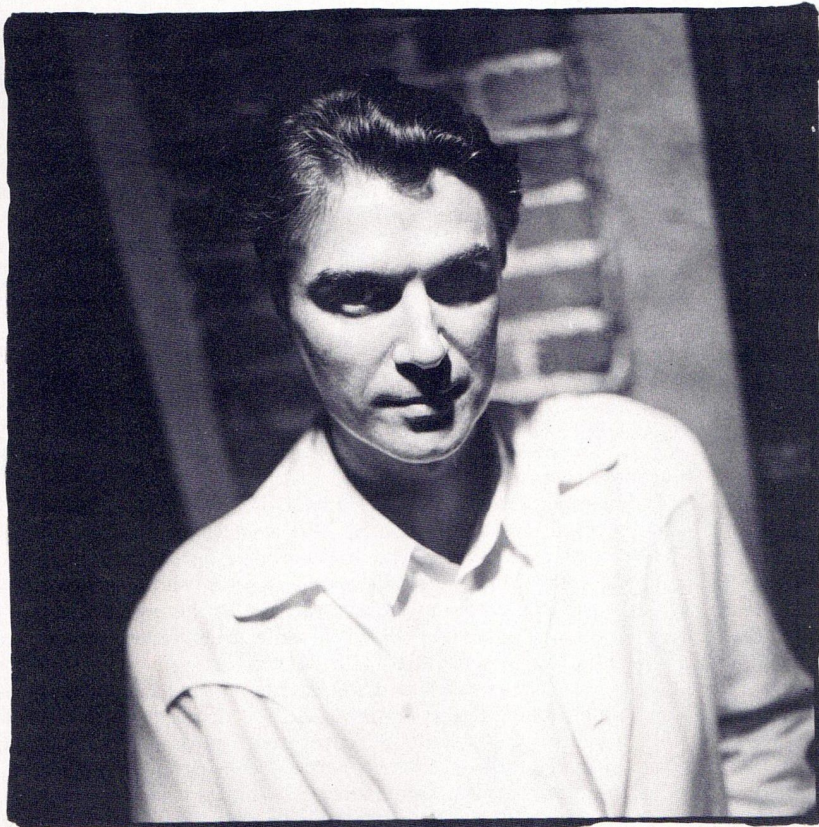


PHOTO BY MIKE NATHANIEL WELCH

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Cover photography by Mike Nathaniel Welch

Brazilian

O B S E S S I O N S

IN THE WESTERN PANAMANIAN VILLAGE OF OCU, WHEN THE SUGAR CANE IS HARVESTED,

campesinos flock to the town's dusty streets for cold beer and long nights of partying.

Their music is *pindin*, hammered out relentlessly

by a trio featuring an accordion, a large triangle, and a set of hand drums called *tamboras*.

The music is as intoxicating as an icy keg

of *Cerveza Balboa* and as natural as a freshly peeled mango.

For me, it was a long night in a hammock

in this Panamanian hinterland that awakened a sense of wonderment

about the pure essence of Latin American music.

For another outsider, it was a series of trips to Brazil in the late 1980s to personally explore

the origins of the music he'd become intrigued with

as an apprentice listener in New York. Quite remarkably,

David Byrne's simmering obsession with the sounds of Brazil's

urban neighborhoods and rural outback and an equal fascination with the music of Cuba

has led to one of the more commendable initiatives

in the recording industry in years. Byrne's series of hand-picked compilations of Brazilian and Cuban music

have succeeded in attracting a new audience to some relatively obscure styles.

Just as Michael Jordan chides us to eat our Wheaties, Byrne has urged pop music fans

to sample his whole-wheat blend of world beat.

In the process, the singer/composer/guitarist has dramatically altered

his own concept of the nature of song.

WORDS BY MARK HOLSTON PHOTO BY NANCY ELLISON



David Byrne has been a high-profile activist in the quest to broaden the public's taste for Brazilian fare beyond the mellow scope of the jazzy bossa nova, but he's far from the only major artist dedicated to broadening our understanding of the music and culture of Brazil.

Milton Nascimento's latest recording is dedicated to Brazil's imperiled rainforests and their native peoples. No quick-and-easy gloss of the social concern-of-the-moment, his *Txai* (Columbia) involved weeks of personal on-site involvement and the integration of actual indigenous music from such tribes as the Yanomani.

For *Awa Yio* (Reprise), Ivan Lins has created what he says is "a very ethnic album, very Third World." Less consciously pop-oriented than *Love Dance*, his last U.S. release, *Awa Yio* speaks the language of samba and Brazil's swirl of African, European, and native cultures in a rhythmically bold, melodic package and contains some of the composer's strongest ideas in years.

Dori Caymmi, the vastly underappreciated composer/performer from Bahia, has rendered a warmly personal vision of his land for his self-titled effort on Qwest. A master arranger known for the subtlety of

his moods and the deft and sparing use of unusual orchestral ingredients, Caymmi taps the unleavened quality of his country's music that's so in vogue today, while retaining the sophisticated tone he's cultivated through years of scoring for films and arranging for friend Sergio Mendes' group and singers like the late Sarah Vaughan.

Far from ebbing, the tide of new Brazilian music is reshaping the parameters of the genre, revealing an amazing number of styles and interpretations. Among those vying for our ears and hearts: sexy songstress Joyce; the exuberant and jazzy vocalist Leny Andrade; guitarist Romero Lubambo; keyboard ace Rique Pantoja; flutist Vera Guimaraes and her updated choro; and a carnival float-load of funky Bahian bands tempting us with zesty Afro-Brazilian reggae. Paul Horn, an early admirer of bossa nova's fresh message 25 years ago, is back with his flute and an all-star Brazilian rhythm section to revisit some favorite haunts. Even Roxy Music guitarist Phil Manzanera has turned to Brazil for inspiration. What's going on here anyway?

"There's a lot of stuff that to me isn't very interesting," David Byrne admits, "but that's fine, because it means some of the more off-

beat or 'out there' kinds of things might actually get released — along with a lot of dreck. Otherwise, the more far-flung stuff might never surface."

Thanks to Byrne's keen ear and marketing sense, the world outside of Brazil is getting an opportunity to hear music even most Brazilians might consider "far flung." Composer/singer Tom Ze, for example, one of Byrne's most recent "discoveries," is so out of sync with what we've been conditioned to hear in "Brazilian" music, he seems like a product of David Byrne's subconscious. Ze, however, was quite alive and well — if unrecognized — in Sao Paulo until a fluke encounter with one of his recordings prompted Byrne to make Ze's music part of his Brazil Classics series.

"The release of his recording here has kind of given him a new lease on life," Byrne says of Ze, a Brazilian minimalist who aims his poetic but pointed lyrics at political targets and pleads for a wide range of social concerns. "He's been writing and rehearsing a band, and has been performing around Brazil, and he hadn't really been doing that for some time." For those who found Ze's *Best of* compilation on Byrne's Luaka Bop label a kind of Brazilian music palette-cleanser, more Ze should be on the way within the next two years.

The hyperactive Talking Heads leader is like the chef of an exotic restaurant, dashing about the stoves, keeping several pots at boil, splashing a dash of secret spices with one hand while the other dices an imported yucca. So busy has Byrne become with personal, Brazilian, and now Cuban recording projects that he's cooked up his own label to help ease production and distribution hassles, and the creation of Luaka Bop exposes yet another facet of the young musician who not that long ago was just another enigmatic pop artist.

Byrne's latest in his series of personal favorites from Brazil is *Forro* (Luaka Bop/Warner Bros). For those who've been counting, *Forro* is officially *Brazil Classics 3*. "I thought of Brazilian music as mainly samba and Afro-Brazilian stuff," says Byrne of his personal discovery of forro. "It was kind of a surprise to hear this coming out of the radio. I thought it was immensely enjoyable and real danceable, and at times very innovative with unexpected arrangements."

Playing the car radio while on a trip to Salvador, capital of Brazil's African culture, was the key to Byrne's discovery of this peppy music of the country's rural Northeast. Byrne sees it as the ultimate party music — a polka-like sound with some of the feel of ska. Listen hard enough and a hint of Dominican merenque and Colombian cumbia will pop out.

Both the late Luiz Gonzaga, the king of the baião rhythm, and his son, pop singer Gonzaguinha, are included in Byrne's compila-



tion. Dominquinhos, a renowned composer and accordionist, is present, as is the universal singer Gal Costa. Perhaps most enjoyable is the forro mega-hit from the 1960s, "Chiclete com Banana," a rapid-fire, rap-like vocal with touches of boogie, rock, and samba in addition to clever tambourine breaks by singer/band leader Jackson do Pandeiro (*pandeiro* is the Portuguese word for tambourine). The late performer's magnetic style conveys the happy, unpretentious spirit of this music of Brazil's rural poor.

Byrne's longtime interest in Cuban music has been documented by Talking Heads ef-

forts like "Mr. Jones" (from *Naked*) and his recent survey of tropical rhythms, *Rei Momo* (Luaka Bop/Sire). "I was listening to the Afro-Cuban stuff at the same time I was hearing a lot of the Brazilian music, although I was hearing it filtered through the American salsa bands," he recalls.

A detour from the jazzy, percussive variety of Cuban music known here as salsa brought him to the work of Silvio Rodriguez, Cuba's contribution to the *nueva cancion* (new song) tradition of protest song. Rodriguez calls himself a troubadour, and shares a concern for people and the planet

fostered by other members of the movement, including such international stars as Argentina's Mercedes Sosa, Chile's Victor Jara, and Brazil's Chico Buarque.

Counting people like Bob Dylan and the Beatles among his influences, Rodriguez says, "There will always be music to dance to and music to listen to. When the lyrics to dance music become so good they deserve to be heard also, we will have reached the ideal." Perhaps taking a cue from Ruben Blades, Rodriguez notes, "we troubadours could aspire to compose dance music."

"His name kept cropping up among people I knew," Byrne says. "He seemed to be a very important figure, so I found as many of his recordings as I could, and I liked a lot of his stuff." So much so that Byrne has released an entire CD of Rodriguez' most provocative material (self-titled, Luaka Bop). "If you think Cuban music is all rhumbas and cha cha chas, you'll be surprised," Byrne promises. "It's pop music with beautiful and sophisticated lyrics, mixed with some typical Cuban settings."

Byrne has also produced his first compilation of Cuban dance music, *Cuba Classics 2 — Incredible Dance Hits* (Luaka Bop). Aficionados of Afro-Cuban music will recognize some of the cast: Conjunto Caney, Maria Teresa Vera, and Chapottin y Sus Estrellas are some of the big names from the '60s and '70s Byrne has singled out for this unusual reissue. Listening to these salty Cuban classics is something akin to stumbling across a late night radio signal from a tropical twilight zone.

Not content to be a one-man Third World music salvage operator, protector of the Talking Heads flame, and star of his own Latin music fantasy, Byrne has also expanded into the realm of symphonic music. *The Forest* is yet another surprise from the musical palette of Mr. Byrne.

"I was always very curious about it," he says of the classical tradition, "but I would never have done it if it hadn't been for the theatre production." *The Forest* began as a theatrical work by Byrne and Robert Wilson, which premiered at the Theatre der Freien Volksbühne in Berlin in 1988. "Given that we were going to set this thing in the mid-1800s, I thought, 'Well, I'll kind of reinforce that by making music that at least alludes to that kind of sound.' I had done a couple of soundtracks by that time, so I had a little familiarity with the sounds of different combinations of instruments, so I thought, 'Let's go ahead and go whole hog and try it out!' I got more and more excited as I worked on it, and it became more of a way of expressing things that I could never express in pop songs."

Orchestrated and conducted by Jimmie Haskell and recorded in both Berlin and Los Angeles, *The Forest* is what Byrne says "draws a lot from the Romantic composers.

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Richard Smith

Finding a Concept

This music helps me see things from the other side."

Milton Nascimento has also spent some time of late viewing things from the other side, and he's disturbed with what he's seen. Recent headlines from Brazil underscore his concerns. "Indian Suicides — Brazilian natives cannot cope with western encroachment," warns one. "Total area destroyed is already the size of France," shouts another about the rapid pace of destruction in the Amazon.

Concern about Brazil's native peoples and the country's embattled environment is drawing increasing numbers of musicians to the cause of protecting and preserving both people and irreplaceable natural elements. A recent concert at New York's Carnegie Hall to raise funds for the Rainforest Foundation found Sting and Elton John sharing the bill with Brazilian stars Tom Jobim, Caetano Veloso, and Gilberto Gil. But Nascimento's holistic approach to the dilemma may set a new standard for Brazilian artists who believe their efforts just might make a difference.

Yes, even the urbane Mr. Jobim is known for his environmental tone, having penned songs about dolphins, rivers, and desert-scapes, but Nascimento, a man of color and a product of Brazil beyond Rio, has taken the artist's role in bringing middle class society face-to-face with disturbing realities to a new level. That he does it with his customary grace and devotion to melody makes his effort all the more rewarding.

The singer/songwriter spent several weeks in 1989 in a land far removed from the consciousness of most Brazilians — the little-visited Jurua River in the western states of Rondonia and Aere, site of some of Brazil's most troubling clashes over land and the future of indigenous peoples. To local Indian tribes like the Waipai, Surui, and Kayapo, the famous singer who might turn an occasional head on the streets of New York or Paris was just another guy. The experience for Nascimento, however, was anything but ordinary.

Txai is unique not only for Nascimento's striking new compositions and his themes that speak of the rainforest and its peoples, but for the integration of seldom-heard music from the people of the forest themselves. Captured on location in the best ethnomusicologist tradition, the music of the Yamomani and other tribes is a powerful complement to Nascimento's predictably sophisticated, jazzy pop. "I sang for them, and they sang for me" is how the composer himself views the paring in its simplest terms.

A longtime activist in the Alliance of the Peoples of the Rainforest, and a representative to the Brazilian Congress on environmental issues, Nascimento says his contact with the native peoples was a life-



Richard Smith is on the faculty at Musicians Institute. He is currently recording and touring with Richard Elliot, Dan Siegel and with his own group The Richard Smith Unit. He records with the CMG Label.

Producing an album is quite a balancing act. Before all of the decisions regarding music, musicians, studios, recording and touring have been made, the message or statement behind the album must fall into place. With my latest album *Rockin' the Boat*, I have tried to address several of the idioms I've grown fond of here in Los Angeles, Bossa Nova, Jazz, Classical, Hip Hop and Be-Bop have all made an indelible impression on me. My concept developed through addressing these idioms in a cohesive way, and in some cases even mixing the more compatible elements together.

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changing experience.

"I realized that people in Brazil have kind of put the Indian culture aside," says Nascimento. "They know nothing about it. They know a lot about the African influence in Brazilian music, and the European influence, but they know nothing about the Indian influence. And they know little of Indian culture. As for me, I think I need to learn more about it. I'm still in a phase where I'm studying it very deeply.

"One thing I discovered," Nascimento continues, "is that the Indian people are so intelligent and have so much wisdom in them and are so ahead of our so-called civilization, in a way, that it's crazy to think that we can't live with them. We could have a mutual exchange of knowledge. If we miss out on what they have to share with us, we will have lost a great deal."

Given its special mission, it's not surprising that *Txai* presents yet another side of Nascimento's writing and singing. The segues of native music are exotic and help maintain the emotional quality Nascimento wanted for the recording, but it's the debut of several striking new compositions, like "Coisas Da Vida" (Things of Life) and the energetic backup of top musicians like drummer Robertinho Silva and keyboardist Tulio Mourao that will delight those who have followed the sound of Minas for over two decades.

If there's one thing that amuses Ivan Lins, it's his categorization as a jazz artist in the U.S. True, his complex, romantic melodies have attracted the interest of singers, arrangers, and instrumentalists in much the same way the jazz world has always revered work by Gershwin and Cole Porter, but Lins sees himself as a mainstream pop artist. If only more pop music here could come close to matching the thought Lins puts into his compositions and performances.

Awa Yio (Reprise) is an overdue joy for Lins followers. Unlike *Love Dance*, *Awa Yio* presents all new compositions, all sung in Portuguese and embellished with some of the strongest ethnic rhythmic elements the artist has ever used. "This music is the direct result of the fifteen years I have spent learning about and working with the folkloric music of Brazil," Lins says.

Lins masterfully injects the right regional flavoring to balance his affinity for rockish samba and lush ballads. "These are songs that ask about the future of my country and of the world," Lins adds. "There are also simple love songs, but love depends on the world we're living in and lovers must ask what they can do to find happiness — what they can do to make things better." Thanks to *Awa Yio*, Lins has improved the outlook for meaningful summer listening.

"There's some sadness in being a musician in Brazil now," laments Dori Caymmi in a ritzy Rio jazz club, surrounded by noisy Brazilian yuppies. "They come to the clubs

CONTINUED ON PAGE 86

RICKY FORD



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BRAZILIAN OBSESSIONS FROM 78

but they don't buy records. That's why it would be impossible to record the kind of album here I can do in the States. It's tough to be a musician in Brazil now, and I hope God can do something about it."

While, it may take God and a raft of Afro-Brazilian deities to alter the current public taste in the land known for the richness of its musical exports, we can be thankful in the meantime that Dori Caymmi had the fare for a trip to L.A. and a date with the Qwest label to record his mesmerizing new album.

The senior son of one of Brazil's truly distinguished families of music (father Dorival is a noted composer, sister Nana a highly regarded singer, and brother Danilo a leading flutist), Caymmi's Brazil is etched in the full-bodied strokes of his guitar and a soft, deep voice. His musical personality is one of the intricate melodies rendered in straightforward and unadorned terms. What he accomplishes with a bare-bones group reveals much about his arranging genius. Why Caymmi and his music aren't better known is an ongoing mystery.

Language and Love (Verve Forecast) is no mystery. Singer/songwriter/guitarist Joyce's second U.S. recording is upfront with its coy sexiness. Unusual for a female singer in Brazil, Joyce composes all of her music and is a superb guitarist. She appears to have it all — a warmly seductive voice with a true jazz feel and the ability to write songs clever enough to challenge a band of seasoned New York City pros.

If Joyce winks at jazz, the venerable Leny Andrade wears her jazz stripes like a big smile. *Luz Neon* (Timeless) is the first real chance most of us have had to experience this Brazilian original. Without a serious doubt, Andrade is her country's leading (if not only) true female "jazz" singer. Okay, much of what Leny does smacks heavily of the late Sarah Vaughan, but then there are certainly an endless number of far inferior role models around. Andrade did well in taking cues from the Vaughan school.

At a time when it's becoming every more difficult to be truly awed by new talent, Andrade delivers a program of Brazilian hits ("Wave," "E," "Adeus America") and a low-key cover of Dizzy Gillespie's "Night in Tunisia" with gusto that brings new meaning to the '60s idea of jazz samba. Expertly backed by horn man Paulinho Trumpete's combo, Andrade's U.S. debut is in a class of its own.

The choro of Brazil is lovingly updated by two intriguing new releases. Sao Paulo native Vera Guimaraes, a flutist possessing a fine, sweet tone and solid sense of swing, brings an adventurous touch to the chamber jazz quality of this stately form of late nineteenth-century Brazilian music. Guimaraes' *Stirring the Forest* (Apamas) features appearances by pianist Marcos

CONTINUED ON PAGE 102

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BRAZILIAN OBSESSIONS FROM 86

Ariel, James Newton (with whom Vera studied the flute), and Brazil's Duke Ellington, the legendary Moacir Santos, heard here on alto sax.

With songs by Pascoal, Santos, Ariel, Nascimento, Weber Drummond (her keyboardist), and Vera herself, *Stirring the Forest* is an elegant tribute to the versatility of a style of music that's known more for its conservative image.

That's exactly the image pianist David Chesky and guitarist Romero Lubambo toy with on *The New York Chorinhos* (Chesky). The pianist has written a program of sixteen *Chorinhos* (little choros) that carry titles like "Broadway" and "Park Avenue." The interplay between guitar and piano is the real attraction here, but Chesky is to be given credit for exploring this unique strain of European classical music, Brazilian style, with such creativity and intelligence. The best compliment the effort can be given is to note that it compares favorably to *Samambaia*, a 1985 recording (featuring pianist Cesar Mariano and guitarist Helio Delmiro) that most Brazilian musicians count among their all-time favorite albums.

From Germany comes an unexpected rush of provocative and enjoyable recordings with Brazilian roots. *Mato Grosso* (Black Sun) features rock visionary Phil Manzanera and Brazilian bassist Sergio Dias in a program of jointly penned material that gives guitarist Manzanera ample space with which to create broad electronic textures. The cover's infrared satellite photo of the Brazilian state of Mato Grosso gives a good visual clue to the brooding, spacey sensation of this set.

Rique Pantoja, meanwhile, has opted for what one critic called — with the nod of approval, by the way — a Michael Franks approach to his new recording, *Love Brought Us Here* (Pacific Coast Highway). The keyboardist makes a bid to be fully accepted as a pop vocalist on this effort featuring Ernie Watts and Lee Ritenour. Perhaps it is most distinctive in being virtually alone among the current crop of Brazilian recordings to be largely minus any serious ethnic influences.

This is not the case with *Sounds of Bahia Vol 1* (Sound Wave), *Olodum* (Sound Wave), and *Reflexu's* (Mango). These three recordings are probably what David Byrne's two-year-old daughter Malu would dig. She's his little barometer for beat and gut-level appeal, following him around with a broad smile and pair of happy feet when the music feels right. This music, with its funky Bahian feeling, is just great.

"There is an incredible richness and diversity in the music there," our fellow traveller mentions again. Incredible. ●



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